# Higher Education Commission: Call for Evidence

## *Autumn 2025*

### Call for Evidence Overview

The NHS faces a critical workforce crisis that threatens the delivery of safe, effective care. A 2024 report by the Kings Fund suggested that there were around 111,000 posts currently unfilled substantively. England has just 3.2 doctors per 1,000 people compared to the OECD EU average of 3.9, requiring 40,000 more doctors to meet international benchmarks. NHS England reported over 25,600 registered nurse vacancies in March 2025, while nursing applications have fallen 35% since 2021. Similar trends exist in midwifery and amongst allied health professionals such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists. High rates of attrition, sickness and burnout compound these challenges — for example, nearly seven in ten hospital and community doctors leave within a few years of joining, while nursing exits within ten years of qualifying rose 43% between 2021 and 2024.

These shortages cannot be addressed without strengthening of education and training capacity, yet providers themselves face acute financial and staffing pressures. Universities are experiencing their third consecutive sector-wide deficit, while 40% of Further Education colleges cancelled courses in 2024 due to staff shortages. Despite ambitious government commitments—including a 92% increase in adult nursing places by 2031/32 through the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and curriculum reforms outlined in the NHS 10-Year Plan—translating policy goals into sustainable delivery models remains a significant challenge.

The Higher Education Commission, in partnership with the All-Party Parliamentary Health Group, is gathering written evidence for the inquiry 'How can education and training systems best support the recruitment, retention and development of NHS staff?'. This inquiry will examine how education policy, provider practice, and wider system structures can be strengthened to meet the NHS's current and future workforce needs.

This Call for Evidence seeks insights from education providers, NHS trusts, professional bodies, regulators, students, and other stakeholders involved in healthcare education and training. We will use your evidence, including practical case studies and data, to develop actionable policy recommendations for national and local government, the NHS, and education providers.

### Instructions

We appreciate that you may prefer to respond only to questions within your area of expertise. The questions are grouped into the following themes:

1. Recruitment and Retention Issues Amongst Healthcare Students
2. Recruitment and Retention of the Educator Workforce
3. Collaboration Between Education and the NHS
4. Aligning Education and Training with NHS Service Needs
5. Resourcing and Sustainability
6. Cross-Cutting Reflections

Please feel free to submit additional evidence that supports our inquiry but may not be covered in the research questions (attach separate documents in Microsoft Word or PDF format). We particularly welcome research papers, evaluation reports, datasets, and case studies demonstrating effective practices or highlighting persistent challenges.

## Case Study Template

If you are providing an example of an initiative, please use the case study template below to structure your response. This may include implemented initiatives with measurable outcomes or proposed/planned initiatives with anticipated benefits and evidence base for expected impact. You may also attach supporting evidence such as reports, datasets, or evaluations.

* **Title & context:** Setting/region; profession(s); stage (pre-reg/foundation/specialty/CPD); population group(s)
* **Problem & baseline:** Barrier(s), challenges and starting metrics
* **Intervention/programme/initiative:** What changed; delivery partners; cost/resources; timeline; regulatory/funding context
* **Outcomes:** Quantitative results (before/after); qualitative feedback (learners/educators/managers); external validation if any
* **Enablers & risks:** What made it work; risks/unintended effects; mitigations
* **Scalability & transferability:** What's needed to scale or replicate elsewhere (people, funding, approvals, data)
* **Contacts & evidence:** Named contact; data sources; links to documents

The deadline for the submission of evidence is **Friday 28th November 2025, 23:59.** Evidence should be submitted via Microsoft Forms or by filling out the word document and sending it to [rhiannon.tuckett-jones@policyconnect.org.uk.](mailto:rhiannon.tuckett-jones@policyconnect.org.uk)

For more information about the Higher Education Commission or this inquiry, please visit our website or contact the research lead, [rhiannon.tuckett-jones@policyconnect.org.uk](mailto:rhiannon.tuckett-jones@policyconnect.org.uk).

### Theme 1 – Recruitment and Retention Issues Amongst Healthcare Students

1. What are the most acute student recruitment challenges faced by institutions? Do these challenges relate to wider workforce shortages?
2. Which groups remain under-represented among healthcare students? Is this more acute in certain courses, regions, or institutions? What factors contribute to this, and what evidence is available on the potential benefits of widening participation?
3. At what stages of education and training do students or trainees most often leave? What evidence exists on why they leave, and what they do afterwards (e.g. move into different NHS roles, other sectors, or leave the workforce entirely)?
4. What policies, practices, or initiatives have been most effective in recruiting and retaining healthcare students? Please provide case studies where available, using the template provided.

### Theme 2 – Recruitment and Retention of the Educator Workforce

1. Where are educator shortages most acute, either by location or by professional role? What are the underlying causes, and what impact do these shortages have on students, trainees, and the wider NHS workforce?
2. What policies, practices, or initiatives have been most effective in recruiting, retaining, developing, and supporting educators? Please provide case studies where available, using the template provided.
3. What initiatives are being used or could be developed to build effective, sustainable, and diverse pipelines of future educators?  Please provide examples of approaches that have successfully broadened participation or strengthened long-term supply using the case study template provided.

### Theme 3 – Collaboration Between Education and the NHS

1. What are the main barriers and enablers to effective collaboration and communication between education providers (including collaboration between HEIs, FE institutions, and other training providers), the NHS, and other partners? How do these affect workforce supply, learner experience, and service delivery?
2. What challenges arise when education and training systems must balance national workforce planning and local/regional priorities? How do different devolution arrangements (e.g. students training across devolved nations) affect coordination and delivery?
3. Can you provide case examples of collaboration between education providers (e.g. HEIs, FE colleges, and other partners), and between education providers and the NHS, that have improved workforce supply, learner experience, or service delivery? Please use the case study format highlighted above

### Theme 4 – Aligning Education and Training with NHS Service Needs

1. What are the main barriers and enablers affecting how education and training institutions adapt curricula, placements, CPD provision, and other training opportunities to meet evolving NHS needs?
2. What examples are there of education, training, or CPD initiatives that have successfully addressed workforce skills gaps or service needs, and what evidence is available on their impact and uptake? Please provide case studies where available, using the template provided.

### Theme 5 – Resourcing and Sustainability

1. What are the main funding challenges affecting healthcare education and training, including issues in allocation, timing, or stability of funding? How do these funding issues impact the quality of provision, the capacity of institutions to deliver training, and overall workforce supply?
2. Are there opportunities to use existing resources more efficiently (e.g. through reallocation, coordination, or alternative management approaches)? Please provide case studies using the template provided. What impacts could these changes have, and what system-level adjustments would be needed to implement them?

### Theme 6 - Cross-Cutting Reflections

1. What system-wide reforms or policy levers beyond funding would have the greatest impact on healthcare education and training? Which should be prioritised by government, and why?
2. What specific examples from other healthcare systems, UK regions, or sectors offer proven approaches that could be adapted for NHS workforce development? What evidence demonstrates their effectiveness and transferability? If possible, please reference specific programmes, research, or international models.

### Additional Evidence

Please feel free to send any additional evidence or information that might support our inquiry but has not been covered in our research questions, by attaching a separate document to your email in either Microsoft Word or PDF format. We are also keen to receive papers, data, or reports that you or your organisation have completed. We would appreciate any data submissions, statistics or case studies showing what works and what does not.

### Submission Permissions

Kindly let us know whether we have permission for the following:

1. Do you give permission for the report to quote your submission?
2. May we attribute the submission to the organisation you belong to?
3. May we attribute the submission to you personally, listing your job role?